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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the written English of Chicano freshman composition students and presents a contrastive analysis of the written English of the hypothetical college freshman, which approximates "standard" English, and the written English of 93 Chicano freshmen. Discussion focuses on various linguistic differences, classified in the following groups: prepositions, articles, conjunctions, adjectives, nouns and pronouns, verbs, possessives, noun complements, plural words, number agreement, idiom, diction, morphology, and syntax. The paper concludes that many of the differences in English usage are not errors in language comprehension; teachers should help Chicano students realize that standard English need not entirely replace their dialect but that using standard English may prove helpful in situations other than freshman English class; and teachers and English departments should seriously question the goals and methods of freshman English courses. (JM)

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CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS and CHICANO COMPOSITIONS

Celia Merrill

Contrary to popular belief and practice, the effective teaching of freshman composition is an acquired ability. Even with a class of well-motivated students familiar with and capable of producing the style of written English (does such a class exist?), the task is not an easy one. Unfortunately, most classes of freshman composition are taught either by professors who have specialized degrees in literature, or by graduate teaching assistants who are working on specialized degrees in literature. The assumption is that if these people can write well themselves, they will be able to teach others how to write. Many of these literary people are disgusted by the chore, for it involves reading stacks of freshman writing. Those who approach the task enthusiastically may soon be discouraged. Knowing how to write doesn't insure success in teaching it, and the ability to lecture coherently on the rhetorical stance doesn't necessarily follow being able to use rhetoric effectively. Simply marking a student's paper and referring him to a handbook rule will not guarantee that he corrects the dangling modifier, misplaced comma, run-on sentence.

In the Southwest, the difficulties are compounded, for the job not only involves dealing with the usual amount of typical freshman errors but also requires that the teacher cope with a composite classroom of students with varied linguistic and cul-

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tural backgrounds. Until recently, this situation has been largely ignored or only hazily understood. In the past five or ten years, sociolinguistic research in the Southwest has come into its own. Research proposals and suggested techniques still constitute a large part of what has been published to date, and what specific data has been presented is often described as "preliminary findings," but some significant projects are underway (particularly papers collected in Bills, 1974; Harvey & Heiser, 1975; and Dubois & Hoffer, 1975). My particular interest has been to examine the written English of Chicano university students, to describe the lexical, morphological and syntactical differences as a first step to describing the Chicano dialect of English. Undoubtedly, a greater understanding of and appreciation for the linguistic background of these students will better prepare us to teach.

My work has been with a collection of 93 freshman composition papers written by Chicanos here at Pan American University.* The 93 papers were written by a total of 48 students; I have from 1 to 5 essays from each student. The topics vary as much as would the topics assigned through the semester in any freshman comp course. Several classes are represented. Length varies. Some few papers received grades of A or B, most were graded D or F. The random collection of these papers precludes any correlation of the data with factors such as language attitude, socioeconomic status, grade-point average and so on. But that very randomness may prove an advantage which this set of papers has over the V series

*My thanks to Earl Frankenberger, Director, Learning Assistance Center, Pan American University, for having collected and sent me the papers.

of the University of Texas at El Paso corpus, a collection of 90 essays written by 30 Chicano students at that campus. The criticism has frequently been made that the V series is too good, that there are fewer "errors" (and that's a loaded word) represented in these papers than would be found in the typical composition of a Chicano freshman (specifically in Ornstein & Dumas, 1975). Except for the heavy concentration of failing and very low passing grades (I hope the proportions are not the norm), these Pan American papers <u>are</u> the classroom compositions of Chicano freshmen. What we find here is what we can expect to find in the classroom.

Perhaps I should begin by explaining what I have <u>not</u> done, and why. I have not tried to do any elaborate statistical count, or much of a count at all. My reasons for this vary, but primarily stem from my basic mistrust of assigning any numerical authority to a collection of data based on the intuitive judgments about language differences and the intuitive classifications of these differences by just one person. I have not tried to collect the errors of omission--avoidance of complicated structures--which Bates Hoffer (1975) discusses as significant. I have not regarded as appropriate to my study any errors of punctuation, or even of spelling except in the case of the confusion of "this" for "these," which can be attributed to phonetic interference from Spanish. Nor have I done much with that large class of errors which includes sentence fragments, misplaced modifiers, run-on sentences, faulty grammatical parallelism, etc., which we find all to frequently in the composition papers of any freshman, Chicano or Anglo. I believe this last group, which Betty Lou

Dubois does include in her analysis of the UTEP V series (Dubois, 1975a), may be significant to a study of Chicano stylistics such as she later outlines (1975b), but are inappropriate to a study such as mine primarily concerned with syntactical variations from a norm. This study is but one step in a long series; comparison of the data here collected with that collected from Anglo compositions would be useful. The variations might also serve as the basis for a field study to elicit dialect features from a larger population.

What I <u>have</u> done is to record each sentence which differs in form from the sentence which a middle-class Anglo freshman might have used in that context. In effect, what I have done is a contrastive analysis of the written English of the hypothetical college freshman which most nearly approximates our so-called "standard" and the written English of Chicano freshmen. In the usual terminology, these variations in Chicano English would be labeled "nonstandard," or at best "deviations from the norm," but I want to dissociate myself as much as possible from the "awkward," "garbled," "redundant" labels which usually mark the "corrected" student papers, and so I will be speaking of"differences," hoping to be as objective as one must be in attempting to describe a dialect.

In classifying the differences, I have devised the following groups (see Appendix A for examples). PREPOSITIONS: These seem to be the differences we most often point to as indicative of language interference, and the large number of instances I recorded in this group may well explain why. Within this group I distinguished between preposition choice, omitted preposition and

unnecessary preposition. ARTICLES: Again the subgroups of omitted, unnecessary, and choice, here between definite and indefinite. CONJUNCTIONS: In this group, the students have either inserted or omitted conjunctions in cases in which our hypothetical Anglo wouldn't have, or their choice between coordinate and subordinate, or among subordinate has differed from the Anglo's. ADJECTIVES: This very small group included those differences in the use or nonuse of possessive and demonstrative adjectives. NOUNS and PRONOUNS: Within this group, in addition to the subgroups of omitted or unnecessary, I have grouped cases of omitted subject, a difference which might possibly be traced to Spanish. Relative pronouns form a separate subgroup. VERBS: Such a simple classification is really misleading. Within this group I have included instances of unusual passivized construction (a very small class), omitted, unnecessary or otherwise unusual modals (another small class), omitted or unnecessary auxiliary "have," differences between past and present participle usage, not past participle marker--in adjective and in verb forms, no past tense marker, double past tense marker, and unusual aspectual conjugation. POSSESSIVES: These include instances in which the possessive marker was omitted in a noun used as an adjective and cases in which the possessive marker was omitted in a pronominal form. NOUN COMPLEMENTS: Under this heading I have listed those differences in the manner of embedding clauses in noun phrase positions. More on this later. PLURAL: This group includes those nouns that are missing plural markers, and nouns which have unnecessary plural markers. I have one instance of an adjective, "negatives," marked

plural. NUMBER AGREEMENT: This class of differences includes agreement between subject and verb, adjective and noun, noun and noun/pronoun. IDIOM: Here I distinguish between English idioms gone awry and expressions which appear to be idiomatic in Spanish and not directly translatable into English. DICTION: This class is a real grab-bag, and different readers might argue different classifications for variations which I lump under this heading. Unusual word choice is probably the most frequent of these differences, although there are unusual word combinations classed here too. Within this group are several instances of incorrect word usage where the correct word and the one used are either formally or phonetically similar--there/their, now/know--or where one noun is substituted for another with similar but not parallel meaning--"schools become great rivalries." MORPHOLOGY: Irregular verb spellings; substitution of a noun for the adjective form or vice versa, an adjective for the adverb form, and so on. SYNTAX: Another misleading heading, this group includes instances of reversed word order within a phrase or clause, and one instance of reversed word order in an indirect question. NEGATIVE: I recorded one instance each of missing negative marker and unusual negative placement, and two instances of double negatives.

The boundaries between many of these groups are like shifting sand; sometimes an instance will strike me as belonging to the class of no plural marker, at other times I see it clearly as a case of number agreement. Some from any of these groups might well be classified as an error which any freshman might make. I'm not sure whether two or more readers would make the classifications

any more scientific, or whether this type of analysis can yet be scientific, but I want to thank Gary Underwood for having started me in the right direction and James Pierce and James Sledd for keeping me in line with their constant questionings about classifications and other matters.

Once the lexical and morphosyntactical variations have been more or less categorized, the process of explanation begins. There are two basic approaches used for explaining why a bilingual constructs a sentence in the way he does; these are the methods of contrastive analysis and what is ordinarily termed "error" analysis. With the publication of Linguistics Across Cultures in 1957, Robert Lado describes in the preface what he calls "a fairly new field of applied linguistics and the analysis of culture, namely, the comparison of two languages and cultures to discover and describe the problems that the speakers of one language will have in learning the other" (Lado, 1957). The usefulness of this comparison for teaching rested on the assumption, Lado states, that the contrast would "predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning." Since that time, the validity of contrastive analysis as a predictive tool has been questioned (Wardhaugh, 1970) and the trend is to follow the technique prescribed by F. G. French in Common Errors in English, in which he states that many errors made in learning English as a second language are common to speakers of all languages. French writes, "The fact that the errors are common indicates that they have a common cause. That common root is not to be found in a wide variety of languages exhibiting innumerable differences in syntax, accidence and idiom. Explanation does not lie in cross-association

and instinctive translation of the mother-tongue, but in the usages of English itself, . . ." (French, 1949).

Neither method is complete in itself, for some of the variant structures may be attributed to native language interference, some to interference from English itself, and some are best explained by a combination of the two. Of the two methods, contrastive analysis has fallen to second best. As one of the researchers in the 1969 Texas A & M project to study Spanish-English bilingualism, Gail McBride Smith writes regarding the English of eight native Spanish speakers, "Very little of their non-standard English can be attributed to interference from Spanish; most of their mistakes are more reasonably traced to something that might be called arrested language development" (Smith, 1969). More recently, Ricardo García made the rather astonishing claim that a comparative study he conducted on the English of lower and middle-class Chicanos revealed that "they did not experience syntactic interference even though they were Spanish-English bilinguals" (García, 1975). Just prior to this he has made the even more incredible claim that "it is almost inconceivable that a Chicano would mix the syntactic patterns of the two languages if he is to speak coherently in either language."

Perhaps the relegation of contrastive analysis to second class importance is justified. To date, most of the Spanish-influenced variations which have been pointed out are usually no more significant than preposition and article usage, lexical choice, perhaps an omitted subject pronoun here, maybe a double negative there, none of which could be said to alter the message

to any great extent. Many of the morphosyntactical variations are easily explained as interference from other structures in English. But to fully explain any variation we must account for all possible reasons for its occurrence. Contrastive analysis does help to explain some variations much more complex than simple preposition choice. By affirming that Spanish does influence syntactical structure, I do not mean to assert, as García does, that incoherence is the result. The message is still clear, and sometimes different is better.

For instance, English has one simple verb form for expressing past, "spoke," a form traditionally called "simple past." If an English speaker wishes to indicate that this action took place over an extended period of time in the past, he generally can do so by using the form "was speaking," the traditional label for which is "past continuous" or "past progressive." In conjugating "hablar" into past tense, Spanish allows, in fact requires an aspectual distinction between the preterite "habló" and the imperfect "hablaba." These forms ordinarily are translated as meaning "spoke" and "was speaking" or "used to speak," but the correspondence is not exact. In some instances, the standard usage of English calls for the simple past and relies upon external modification for aspect, while Spanish would use the imperfect--"I remember turning around and she was nowhere in sight" in Spanish would be expressed using "estaba" for "was." To the native Spanish speaker, using "was" may seem incorrect since it corresponds to the preterite. "was being" and "used to be" are even worse. The choice of the past perfect by the writer of this

sentence, "I remember turning around and she had been no where in sight," is actually a fairly logical resolution of this difficulty. Other instances of this are, "She came over to see it and she had liked it quite a bit," and "I didn't get to know what she had thought about it."

The process by which a clause under the noun phrase heading is embedded into a sentence reveals other ties with Spanish.* Some variations, like those in my first seven groups (see Appendix B), can be attributed only partially to Spanish influence. Because Spanish allows the gerundive noun complement only with a very limited class of verbs of observation and perception, its frequent use in English constructions can be confusing. In the first group the possessive marker which standard English attaches to the subject of the gerund has been omitted. The second set of three might possibly be evidence of confusion of the infinitive (minus infinitive marker "to") with the gerund, but I am more inclined to think these are instances of omission such as any writer makes, particularly since the latter two demonstrate in the same sentence their ability to handle gerunds. The writer of the first sentence in the third group is in transition between the infinitive form which is most frequent in Spanish and the less familiar gerund. The second, though it looks much like the first, again seems to have been caused by haste or carelessness.

*For my information on Spanish I am indebted to José Calván. Further information on verb restrictions I have drawn from the Robert P. Stockwell, J. Donald Bowen, and John W. Martin text, The Grammatical Structures of English and Spanish.

Standard English usage dictates that the infinitive form cannot serve as the object of a preposition, which requires a gerund complement. The writer of the sentence in the fourth group is following correct Spanish form.

The example in the eighth group is particularly interesting. "Believe" in English belongs to that class of verbs which will take an infinitive object complement only in cases where the subject of the embedded clause has been raised and reflexivized--I believe myself to be honest--or it will take a clausal complement--I believe that I will never forget--but it cannot take an infinitive complement which has undergone equi-noun phrase deletion--I believe never to forget. Consider how the verb "hope" works in the same sentence. "I hope that I will forget" is acceptable and so is "I hope to forget." Spanish "creer" allows the infinitive complement when the embedded clause has undergone equi-noun phrase deletion (the opposite of "believe"), and requires the clausal complement in other cases. The sentences in the next two groups also indicate that the writers have possibly followed the rule restrictions for complementation governing these verbs in Spanish rather than those prescribed by English. Groups eleven, twelve and thirteen include instances in which students have deleted or not deleted complementizers according to Spanish rather than English verb restrictions.*

The writers of the sentences in group fourteen may have omitted the "to" infinitive marker required in English since

*The translations back to Spanish from these English sentences are artificial and in some cases more complicated than I have presented it. The Spanish translations are grammatical and follow the rule restrictions, but in many cases a native Spanish speaker would never have used that particular construction in that context.

Spanish carries that marker in a verb stem affix. Since Spanish verbs also carry the implied pronoun subject by a suffix, the first three sentences of the next to last group are also interesting. These are examples of extraposed complements in which the students have omitted the "it" pronoun subject. It would be interesting to study Spanish instances of extraposed subject complements in light of the linguistic debate over whether the surface structure pronoun "it" is found in the deep structure as a head noun or is in fact inserted following extraposition.

The last group includes sentences which show no apparent connection to Spanish and so must be attributed to haste, carelessness, possibly confusion.

Given this contrastive information, how do we use it in the freshman comp classroom? An obvious response is that we can pass this information about language differences on to the student so that he will understand why he made the error and correct it. But before we make any pronouncements about how this, or any other supposed miracle cure, will rid the world of the dangling modifier and imprecise thought, we can not avoid recognizing some certain facts and asking some serious questions.

The principal fact that we must accept is that many of these differences in English usage are not errors. The written English of any Chicano student includes the usual number of mistakes such as run-on sentences and sentence fragments, and it would be naive to deny that this student will probably have more trouble with spelling or with writing than does the average Anglo freshman whose speaking dialect more nearly approximates the style of Edited

American English we demand in the classroom. But all too frequently, any variation from the standard is considered to be an indication of faulty language comprehension. When the Chicano writes "I believe never to 'orget" he may well be writing according to the rules of his own idiolect or dialect. Any interference, whether from Spanish or from other English constructions, has occurred before this time and been incorporated into his speaking grammar. Obviously, the dialect does not block effective communication, or these Chicanos would never have reached the university level.

So the "awk," "garb" and "mech" which clutter the margins of these papers are sometimes incomprehensible (in more ways than one) to the student. What he sees is an inexplicable attack on the language which functions perfectly well in all but the freshman composition class. If we can successfully explain to the student that the dialect required for a freshman theme is simply different from and not intended to entirely replace his speaking dialect, we have made a start. If we can convince him that learning that new dialect of written English will prove useful to him in other ways than by simply helping him to pass freshman English, we've taken another step.

At this point we must ask ourselves as individual teachers and as departments what sort of class freshman composition really is, what it has been, what it can be. What are our goals in teaching first semester freshman English, to Chicanos or to any student? Do we see our task as teaching Standard Written English, or as the development of writing skills such as rhetorical

strategy, modes of discourse, organization? Can we reasonably expect to do both by assigning 8 to 10 themes to write and half again that many essays to read in one semester? Should we even try to impose Standard English on students who don't want to learn it, and fail them if they resist? As my data shows, no instance of nonstandard usage was so peculiar as to interfere with the message. What are our justifications for teaching Standard English? If we teach it as a tool for upward mobility, can we give proof of how these writing skills will actually open doors? If we teach it as a more versatile dialect with greater expressive potential, can we show this to be true?

For every question here, there are ten more of equal importance. The "new approaches" to composition are myriad. If there is any truth in Newsweek (December 8, 1975, "Why Johnny Can't Write), our efforts have been misguided, if not worse. I am inclined to think that if John or Juan can't write, it is often because our excessive concern over surface details such as grammar have taken priority over our giving serious thought to what that student has to say, however imperfectly. Constant correction and criticism will eventually make the most resilient retreat. Couldn't we instead try to first expose the student to Standard English through an intensive reading course, helping him to comprehend the unfamiliar before we demand that he produce his own perfect copy?

Sometimes our ready answers obscure the real questions.

APPENDIX A

PREPOSITIONS
choice: he was limping from his reigh leg
omitted: while we waited the return
unnecessary: The weather suits for the type of crops

ARTICLES
choice: Although in this life a birth of a baby
omitted: The enchiladas are made in similar way
unnecessary: The Delta Lake

CONJUNCTIONS
choice: However our year was filled with sorrow; happiness was imminent
omitted: my car just lost control and went straight ahead hit something
unnecessary: you talk about the good and old times

ADJECTIVES
possessive: which was my happiest day of my life
demonstrative: I [illegible]s for that punishment (first mention)

NOUNS & PRONOUNS
omitted: The tacos and the enchiladas are two of the most popular thru out the United States and other countries.
unnecessary: the word shirt in other parts of the world it means
omitted subject: Also, played his organ with alot of class.

VERBS
passive: For instance, corn is referred to a particular cereal crop (the word "corn")
modal: there are other kinds of persons who rather have friends
have: Attuides can be changed once they been tried
participle choice: this advertisement emphasizes the durability of the fabric and the guard against soil and stain
the people more convincing about this product.
past participle marker: If my team is losing, I feel depress
tense, omitted: I use to have in mind
tense, double: when did it happened
aspect: It is not a complicated thing to do but the cook needs to be watching it

POSSESSIVES
adjective: The Volunteer Army will soon become ineffective in carrying out it mission
pronoun: It is her fault and no one else

NOUN COMPLEMENTS (see Appendix B)

PLURAL
omitted: They are only freshman, junior, or seniors
unnecessary: an entire different words

NUMBER AGREEMENT
When two players disagrees

IDIOM
English: to realize that Santa Claus was made believe
Spanish: The second major step is to put the stove on

DICTION
word choice: everything is disorderly moved around
similarity: Their times when I sit around doing nothing

MORPHOLOGY
For example, by voting for an incompetence and selfish leadership

SYNTAX
phrase: To my view of point
clause: Some trouble we found ourselves in.

APPENDIX B

1. ...in order to avoid people being out of their homeland and government complaining that people spend American money in other parts of the world.
One person can have as many friends that he wants just by him being their friend.
Todays generation being involved with the drug scene has led the older generation to think that their ability to survive on earth is a fifty-fifty chance.
My Volkswagen being such a small car and with all the excess weight of us caused my pessimistic to approach

2. We kept on see each other as much as we could....
The fourth major step is to start putting everything together and start serving them hot and eat them at the same time.
We would do this by getting a large white sheet and putting it over one of us and dance on the side of the highway....

3. Everybody who came close to him just started to sneezing his head off.
...girls started asking about her ex-football-star-husband and wanting to meeting.

4. Poor condition and surrounding will sometime be the cause of students to dropout.

5. The military draft had rules and regulations which permitted only those capable to be drafted....
The employer fears he is not capable to handle the type of job....

6. ...life is worth of living.
In applying the wax to the car it will require some clean rags....
Just by having your rights is good enough....

7. Usually when one sending a gift, we tend to examine a person...
Especially brisk is the business done in ale houses and beer joints near campus, not mentioning clothing stores, etc.

8. It was a very interesting and exciting experience which I believe never to forget....

9. She wouldn't want her pet might have deform or imperfect kittens.
The second major step is that you put the oven on.

10. The rices requires to be watch about every 5 minutes,...
He takes immediate action on matters which require to be thoroughly studied beforehand.

11. The rains cause for streets to flood in the cities and for animals to die....
This caused for Pedro to miss one year of school.

12. My point of view of smoking marijuana is it should be allowed....

13. I think that Bilingual Education should be a required course here at PAU because: would make Anglo-Americans to speak Spanish, would help Mexican-Americans speak Spanish....

14. I told him that I wanted to experience a test-hop, which is test the airplane by the test pilot.
I have so many friends cause usually talk to them and listen to what they're saying makes you happy.
There is no way this can be prevented and the residents have learn to take these problems as best as they can.
I found it very easy identif[illegible] with her [illegible]...

15. For instance, when you go out to buy your car's insurance, you look for an insurance agent, who at one time, was expected a man to explain your plan or policy.

16. ...because I had lied to him that I was sick just so I could take time off for this sale.

17. ...I have known people who have smoked marijuana for one or two years and than quiet completely and doesn't bother them to see someone else smoking it..
So happens that my boss is my brother-in-law....
...I find it very enjoyable because I enjoy hearing good music of different type and is very relaxing to see a comedy show.
I take that Letty is some type of bookworm.

18. In Physics there is a law which says matter can neither created or destroyed....
Marijuana is unhealthy because it is liable to ruined your mind.
...for example when you need a helping hand or to help you out by other ways of showing their concern.

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